

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Hiromu Tsuji, 69, retired plantation store bookkeeper,  
Paia

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Hiromu Tsuji, Japanese, was born February 10, 1911, in Hiroshima, Japan. He came to Hawaii as an infant in 1912 and lived in Hamakua Poko, Maui, where his father was a Japanese-language schoolteacher. Three years later, the family moved to Hakalau, Hawaii so that his father could teach at the new Japanese-language school.

In 1922, Tsuji returned to Hamakua Poko, and in 1929, graduated from Maui High School. That same year, after doing field work for a short time, he began working in the office at Paia Store. In 1941, he became cashier and assistant accountant.

Following the merger of HC&S and MA Company in 1948, Tsuji transferred to Kahului Store and became office manager. He retired in 1969.

Today, Tsuji lives in Kahului with his wife Mitsuko. He is active in church activities and is a member of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship.

Tape No. 7-69-1-80  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Hiromu Tsuji (HT)

April 19, 1980

Kahului, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Hiromu Tsuji. Today is April 19, 1980 and we're at his home in Kahului, Maui.

Okay, you started working in the Paia Store in 1929, yeah?

HT: Mm hmm. [Yes]

WN: Can you tell me how you got that job working in Paia Store?

HT: Through a friend of mine who introduced me to the manager and they tried me out as the office boy, carry the mail, file in bills, do odds and ends of the others. That was the beginning.

WN: Before that what kind of work were you doing?

HT: I worked in the field, hauling seeds--cane seeds, they call that pulapula--and culverts for field irrigation system. I didn't do that too long because when we were delivering the culverts which weighed 300 pounds each I strained my back and landed in the hospital. So, after recovery, I applied for this store job and I started working there.

WN: How much were you making out in the fields?

HT: My salary was the same amount what I was getting outside there. That was \$1.25 a day or \$35, plus 10 percent bonus.

WN: You mean if you work a certain amount of days?

HT: I don't know how they used to do that but then all I know is I get my salary at \$35, plus 10 percent bonus monthly. That's my salary, they were paying back in 1929.

WN: This was the store salary?

HT: Yeah, and the field pay was the same. Probably they just continued paying me until I proved myself better. (Laughs)

WN: How long did you remain an office boy?

HT: I did odds and ends until, uh, the changes came in the beginning of the Second World War. That's when I was asked to become cashier and assistant accountant. And that's how I started making use of what I really learned at school. And, I had a good office manager who helped me a lot and this is why I continued on with my work.

WN: You said there were some changes right after the war [started], what kind of changes?

HT: Well, the work opportunity was there at that time, for me, because whoever it was--at this point I don't want to mention the name--but this person was interned for his activities that he was carrying on at the Japanese School plus probably at the church, you know, Buddhist Church. Whatever he was doing there. But then, after several months later he came home because they didn't find any evidence of his fifth column work or anything like that. And he began to work at the same company [Paia Store] but the boss made me continue with the work that I was doing and assigned him to different work. I believe at the time we started wholesale business so he became a wholesale salesman in Paia Store. I think that was it.

WN: When you first started as an office boy in 1929 you remember about how many employees Paia Store had?

HT: No, I wouldn't know exactly how many because I didn't have access to the figures. But I believe they may have had probably in the neighborhood in the sixties maybe.

WN: So when you started working in 1929, the system of--they were doing a lot of deliveries in those days?

HT: Yeah, those days we had the charge sales and deliveries for those in the country area and local areas. The drivers used to deliver the merchandise to each home, and same thing with the countryside, too. So, the drivers used to have helpers in the beginning but in the end they were cut down to the drivers only, and they made the delivery. Then the bills were made out and mailed to them and they paid according to the billing.

WN: The bills were mailed out to everybody?

HT: In some areas the salesmen take it out with them, especially in the country areas. So we had some salesmen walking and taking orders from different areas and these people worked pretty long hours, but

I think the sales we had was mostly charge sales and less cash at that time. And that's the reason why on the plantation we used to have payroll deduction and they used to have these newcomers--they had this coupon system to help them out in buying their groceries or whatever they need.

WN: Could you describe that coupon system, how it worked?

HT: I'm not too deeply informed about that thing but then from what I see it's an advance payment on their salary, whatever they going to earn to help them out with their immediate needs in their homes. Then that amount is deducted from their earnings for that month. You know, when they receive their payment--they are paid the following month when it's deducted from that amount.

WN: You mean new workers would get these coupons?

HT: Mm hmm [yes]. Mostly the new workers. In case maybe some of these people are sick and cannot work and probably single, I believe, they used to apply for it. Then when they were able to work it's deducted from them or when they start working they need some food and clothing, they have an advance made and they get it with the coupons.

WN: How is the coupon different from say, just going in the store and charging. How come they couldn't just go and charge?

HT: This is the ticklish area, sensitive area where in case a person skips you hold the bag. But if the person is working then its okay. And we had some trouble with credit sales and once they go--they start accumulating their balances its pretty hard to get caught up, you know, it takes time. But the payroll deduction used to help them out and they come in and talk over with the office manager and make an arrangement about the account. And the budget is set up in such a way that we could help them out and the payroll deduction is instigated at the time.

WN: You know the deduction, was that for every worker?

HT: If they want to but then it's mostly for people who have had trouble with their finances. But, a lot of people they rather have it that way because when they get the money they don't have to come to the store, you see? Some people like that and some people don't but I guess to each his own.

WN: Would they deduct the whole bill from their pay check or part of the bill?

HT: No, they don't deduct everything. They allow, in case they do have a big bill they don't deduct everything because the needs are there for that person, so many percentage of that was left behind. That is left up to the department, whoever runs that payroll.

- WN: So getting back to the coupons, in other words when somebody first starts to work, then they cannot charge right away then?
- HT: No, they get the coupon then and these people mostly the Filipinos coming from Philippine Islands--they come, they sign a contract to work for so many years. So they come and these are the ones that they help them out. You know, their needs, their clothing, utensils, whatever they buy and then they work it out.
- WN: Generally, how long does it take for them to be able to stop getting the coupons and just charge?
- HT: According to the way they work, I guess, because I'm not--I wasn't in that area so I don't know too much about it because it's two separate operations between the store and the plantation. We just submit our figures to them [plantation] and they supply us. Like the payroll deduction, we supply the figures and they give us. And these Filipinos, whoever wants the coupons they apply to the plantation payroll department.
- WN: Oh I see, not with the store?
- HT: No, no, they get the coupons from the plantation, then they come with the coupon to us and they buy the merchandise. So in that area we had nothing to do, only thing is they come with the coupon and then they buy whatever they want, we supply them with it. But then when they start working regularly, should they find themselves falling behind their payment then we call them in and they go on the payroll deduction basis. Current account plus so much on the balance, until the balance is cleaned up.
- WN: Was there a way of checking up when someone comes in to charge, was there a way of saying, "oh, maybe you better get a coupon" or something like that?
- HT: Well we had the "slow" list or "no credit" list, you know? We review the sales ledger to see how these people are working out and people with no credit--we have a list. Those that on a "slow" list we have a book, special for that so we tried to help them out by keeping that "slow" list record. They know how much they buying because a lot of times these people, they don't realize until they're up to their neck how much they had bought so far, you see? This was something new to me when I started working, you know. (Laughs) Because I didn't realize that they had such things as "slow" list or something like that. These are the accounts where we keep them in that credit limit for the month.
- WN: Was there a set limit for everybody?
- HT: Yeah.

WN: How much was that?

HT: All depends, those days dollar was a dollar so when you think about it--today when you think about it, it's ridiculous but some of them had \$50, some \$35, \$40, or some maybe \$75, maybe \$100. All depends on their earning power. And how much they can spend.

WN: Did it depend on earning power or maybe the size of the family, something like that?

HT: Normally we go according to their earnings because sometimes you can get out of hand.

WN: What if somebody had a low-paying job and had ten children in the family, would they have any kind of credit or could they make a higher credit limit?

HT: I don't know if they had such things as welfare that time but probably they should go there. Maybe they been there, I think, you know? And I know some people were getting help from the welfare.

WN: In 1929?

HT: I know some people were getting because I was told at times. I didn't know much about these things but I was told that they were--some people were receiving help from somewhere, somehow, to reimburse their living costs. But I wasn't too sure because those were my early years, I don't know much about it.

WN: So when you said it depends on the earning power, did you folks like have a job classification and saying this guy has this kind of work which means his credit limit is...

HT: No, no, he comes in and he talks with us and decides so much he's going to need for monthly. So we agree on that. Then some months he may need more so he comes in and talks it over with the office manager. They review the account and see if he could stand that or not. All this one to one basis, you know, confidentially they settle this thing. So, so far we didn't have any trouble. Few went sour but then I think we had pretty good record.

WN: This is all, you're talking about all before the war [World War II] time?

HT: Yeah, from the time that I started. But after the war when the union came into the picture the earning power increased because the earning setup was changed.

WN: Okay, maybe we can get into that a little later. When you first started from 1929 on, we're talking about credit, how about kompang people?



HT: We advanced them, you know, we give them [credit] and when the cane is harvested, when they get their contracted amount after all the other expenses are deducted, then they come and pay our. . . .We submit our figures to the plantation and they deduct it from the contract amount that they receive.

WN: Oh, I see, so after two years or eighteen months and the cane is harvested and they accumulated say, \$200 in bills from the Paia Store ...

HT: We get our money.

WN: You get it from the plantation?

HT: Yeah, we submit the figures when they let us know that certain, certain person is going to receive payment so they like to get the figures, if they have any balance with us so we give them the figures.

WN: So a kompany man when he gets paid he'll have it already deducted, his grocery bill?

HT: Yeah, usually. But some of them they keep their accounts up to date, you know. So, they haven't much [balance]. But some people where they have big families they are the ones that are hard hit so.... But then my next neighbor, once, I believe he had the best crop, I think. Even his picture came out in the news [chuckles]. The highest tonnage I think and boy, was he happy because he was able to clean up everything. (Laughs) I used to feel really love for them, you know, how they struggle in the field. Sometimes they come home all wet and everything. But they did well, though, during those fields a lot of time.

WN: You know, I was wondering, kompany man, he would get little bit wage, right? During the...

HT: Yeah, they get so much, I believe.

WN: Is that deducted at the end?

HT: That part I'm not too sure, I think so, though. You know, they probably make some kind of agreement to advance maybe. See, that area I'm not too sure because it's different operation.

WN: How did Paia Store get its goods?

HT: We used to order direct to the Mainland companies. So the Mainland representatives used to come and orders were placed with them. In case we run short we make out the purchase orders and send it to the company. See, we had two big, great warehouses in Paia Store. The Kahului Store was the same thing they had two big warehouses,

too. We used to funnel all our orders through--like A&B used to have offices in San Francisco, I think one in Seattle and one in New York. I don't know how long that continued but we have one in Honolulu. All these orders go and its funneled through.

WN: Did you deal with any of the local wholesalers?

HT: Yeah, some we placed an order for immediate need if the person cannot wait or whatever, immediately. But usually when you get it, if they can wait it's all the better because you can get better price. Locally, it's higher.

WN: So, was Paia Store able to have better prices than, say, like independent stores?

HT: Mm hmm [yes], because we had the capital to buy. That's the reason why we were able to get these representatives come and we place the order with them and buy quantity, we get better price.

WN: These Mainland representatives, did they deal only with MA [Maui Agricultural] Company and HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company] stores?

HT: No, they go to others, too. Like we had the Maui Dry Goods here. And there were other stores, too. I believe they go to other stores but price range I don't know, what kind of price they quote to the others. See, we [Paia Store] take care our own this side [MA Company]. Kahului Store used to take care on this side [HC&S] before the merger [in 1948] and those days we had a lot of independent merchants. I don't know how many of them utilized their service. I don't know.

WN: So up until the war time, how profitable was the Paia Store?

HT: I don't remember going in red, though. (Laughs) All I know is, I believe it was in 1946 or 1947 we saw the first--we ended up with red figure anyway for the year but it was small amount.

WN: You were telling me a story about someone was telling you that Paia Store wasn't supposed to make a profit or something like that?

HT: Oh, that's the one. That was in the depression year, before the depression year, I think was. That one year we ended up with net profit before tax \$30,000. One day our store manager was called to the plantation manager's office. We were just wondering what was going on because the boss returned all flustered. Our office manager asked him what happened and he said, "Oh, I got dirty hell."

He said, "What do you mean?"



He said, "Oh, I was told that we were supposed to accommodate the employees, not make money on them." (Laughs) But I don't know, now it's the opposite. (Laughs)

WN: So actually the intent of the plantation store, are you saying was. . .

HT: Yeah, the old days was to accommodate the employees, you know, the old days. This was the intent of the manager's wish, you know, but then that particular year we didn't realize we had that much of a profit, and the general manager of the plantation got upset. (Laughs)

WN: So, what was done about that? Do you know?

HT: Well, what's done is done. We couldn't raise the price or nothing, but then we go according to the market. But then we cannot gouge them, but we go according to the market, whatever the price is.

WN: Did you folks do anything like lower the prices?

HT: The markup at that time was to cover the expenses plus a little profit to take care of any expenses, so it wasn't too high. In fact, we were lower so there were a lot of people from Wailuku [who came] up our way shopping. We used to see a lot of Wailuku customers, people up our way shopping, you see. Kula people same thing, they come down to Paia Store.

WN: Because of the prices?

HT: Probably so but maybe they can come and shop and they get complete--they can fill their orders because we had white goods, hard goods, groceries, hardware and everything, all different kind of items. So a lot of people used to come and they fill up their order and they go right home.

WN: I was wondering, could those people charge, too?

HT: Yeah, lot of them used to charge, too, those that I know, up Kula way. But Wailuku people there were some charging but a lot of them were paying cash.

WN: So how did you determine who gets to charge and who can't?

HT: They have an interview with the office manager and then at that time he will review and see whether it's okay or not. So I don't think the procedure is any different than today. What I mean is you check with the other creditors and you ask them if they buy from some other area.

WN: So, you folks allowed credit to these people from Wailuku and Kula, that's a little more of a risk than say the plantation people?

HT: Well, that's true because we do have write-offs, too. We hate to give it to the collectors or attorneys. Like attorney John Brown, he's still living today and he tells me, he said, "You guys no good."

I said, "What do you mean, John?"

He tells me, "After you exhaust your way of doing it, then you give me so I don't get too much commission." He's a good old soul, is nice guy.

(Laughter)

WN: What do you think were some of the advantages of say, plantation store charging as opposed to the outside stores charging?

HT: The plantation charges well, we know the majority of the account is plantation [employees] so we can get direct dealing with them through the plantation payroll department, when we want to get payroll deduction okayed. That's the reason a lot of times, when you go to the plantation office on paydays, you see a lot of different store agents there with the bills trying to collect their account from what this individual receives in the envelope. Because the old days they used to pay off [wages] in cash. Later it was made in check but in the old days they used to pay off in cash. Kind of risky though. (Laughs)

WN: When you started in 1929, they were paying in cash?

HT: Cash. Then later on was changed to checks, I think that was it. That's why plantation stores were fortunate because we were able to help out the new employees that comes in. They have that coupons and those working, they establish their credit and they buy on charge, credit sales. And in case they go sour we usually get together and through payroll deduction to their current account we add so much of the past due and finish up the old balances. So, we worked it out nicely. But to get an outsider it's another thing. We used to have a special collector for that, to go out.

WN: You said that during payday when they're lining up, you said, other stores used to come and...

HT: Yeah, they used to be there.

WN: What, Paia stores or...

HT: No, no, no. Other stores like the Maui Dry Goods or maybe [Paia] Mercantile or different stores around there. Yamato Store or those people, they get their statement, they know the people so they wait over there, when they come in they can get them. (Laughs) That's why I used to think why [they were there], you know, when I was new when I was there. Then I began to see the light, and then I said,

no wonder. That's the easiest way because if you go later on you might not get anything. They might spend it someplace else or something or they put away in the bank. But a lot of them, when I think about it, a lot of them used to hide away some of that money in some secret place in their home. Then there were a lot of stories about employees, they put it in a coffee can and save it and bury it in their chicken coop. And a lot of them, if they want to rob the person they go into the house but they don't find anything. So I had the credit manager with me, he said, "You know, Tsuji, I had the hardest time getting this guy, but I had to go with him in the chicken coop and talk to him and you know, that man said these are my best pals." (Laughs)

WN: The chickens?

HT: And he was one of them that buried his money out there for safe-keeping, but he does that when nobody's watching because those are really risky, eh? You don't know when somebody's watching you. (Laughs) But those were the good old days.

WN: Did the independent stores maybe call up the plantation store and ask them about a certain creditor if he's good or not? Was there this kind of cooperation between plantation store and the outside stores?

HT: I believe there was, though. They give us reference then we check with them because they give us permission to do so, to check with them, so we do that. Because [when] these people go to some other area and apply for credit, they put our company name inside there for reference so we supply information.

WN: So stores did keep that kind of records as to who's a good credit and who's not?

HT: Yeah, we more or less know, you know. Because we work constantly with these people, you know, their accounts. But, a lot of time these credits is not too good, too, you know. When they're really stuck with you they go to elsewhere and buy. Then they get in debt again at the other place, they come back crying for help, you see? But then we have to be real careful because they have a balance there and they have a balance with us and they want to buy. So we make a strict agreement that he would buy so much and pay so much on the balance. But in the meantime he has to pay the other side, too. Then he really gets in a bind. These are the kinds of trouble that some people used to run into, you know, different customers. These are the areas, the real sensitive areas.

One thing is when you help them out they will never forget you. You know, they turn out to be a good customer. But these are the things that one has to be real careful. That's the one thing I know. They run in with you and they leave with you a sour remark and later on you see them after several months, they come back to

you crying for help and they are plantation people. But other than that, everything worked out.

WN: So you said right about the war time you got promoted to assistant cashier and accountant.

HT: Yeah, in that area, yeah.

WN: Was that your title up until your retirement?

HT: 1948.

WN: Oh, until the merger?

HT: Yeah, 1948 they just put me accountant because I had the cashier separate. See, accountant is the supervisor in charge of the office.

WN: So during World War II, how was business?

HT: Oh, was really good. They were so scared of not being able to get the items so they cleaned up our shelves, pretty much. (Chuckles)

WN: Who is "they"?

HT: The customers. You know, the material that we had was expensive items but they really sure bought it out, you know, the silks, the fancy ones. And we had some Japan goods department, some of those went out, too. In fact, the scare was so much that they had to close, I think, the stores. And stopped the hysterics, you know, the people were buying crazy and after that it simmered down.

WN: Did the soldiers come around a lot and buy?

HT: Yeah, we were supplying groceries mostly and we had our stock pretty much in to supply them. But the other merchandise, they didn't move so much at that time because some foods were rationed and so the people were more careful in their buying. But as far as the end figure for the year, we did good all the years. But when the war ended we were left with a big inventory. All of a sudden what the armed service used to buy they didn't buy anymore, so we were left with the goods on our hands.

WN: Did you folks overstock because of the war?

HT: Yeah, a lot of the merchandise we had quite a bit on hand and because of the transportation situation whatever was available we bought. This is the reason why we had the overstock in merchandise. Because you don't know how many boats were going back and forth between here and the Mainland. So we find that after the war ended, we found ourselves with a heavy inventory, and to get rid of that it took us quite some time before we were able to come back to

normal. And some of the merchandise that we had stored in other areas was damaged because termites or something else. Maybe the roof wasn't good, you know--temporary storage warehouse--so we took a loss on that. So we had to move the old stock out but then the people were smart enough, they were saying, "Let's wait for the new merchandise to come in." So here we were, we had this merchandise but we have to get rid of it. So at the marked down price we sold it out. So naturally when you do those things you take a loss. So little by little it was taken care and then we were back to normal but then with the labor movement. . .

WN: In 1946? [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]

HT: Was 1946, they came into the picture and the cost of manufacturing [went up] with the increase in the operation. We were thinking, you know, when you get a big figure at the end of the year, the end figure in your profit-and-loss statement. You feel pretty good but when you start showing the red figure then you begin to think twice. So you make a study and cut back and whatnot and you have a lot of conferences with the executive officers. Then you begin to cut down on certain lines of merchandise.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HT: And then close down some unprofitable operations like some branch stores. Here what comes into our mind was where we going put the employees. The merchandise you can sell out and get rid of, but the employees. . . . So, some of the employees were transferred to some other areas and some were absorbed by HC&S, if I'm not mistaken, some of them.

WN: Now, this closing down of the branch stores, did this start to happen right after the union came in?

HT: No, before that we were closing already. We closed down H. Poko [Hamakua Poko] Store at that time and left only the H. Poko Camp Store and that was in 1940, if I'm not mistaken. [There were two plantation branch stores in Hamakua Poko.]

WN: H. Poko Store was the first branch store to close?

HT: Yeah, when we were at Paia Store, you know, before the merger. And the Old Kailua Store we had, we closed that. And, when we converted Paia Store to supermarket operation we closed the Paia Meat Market. So no sense of having two meat markets. . .

WN: So around 1940 was when the branch stores started to close, now, can you actually tell me why they became not profitable to have these branch stores?

HT: See, H. Poko Store we had a big store there and we had another store in the camp. Now, for our supply we can get it from the [camp] store--immediate supply--but then those days they were still delivering so Paia Store would leave for the merchandise. And probably there were some changes in the countryside because the Haiku [Fruit and Packing] Company I think they weren't operating. I don't know what year they went out of business. Because there were some changes.

WN: They were transferred to Dole [formerly Hawaiian Pineapple Company], you mean?

HT: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Oh, about 1938?

HT: Could be, I think. And that made some changes, you know, less people to deal with in the countryside, so instead of having a big operation they could have gone through Paia Store, you see? So closed down that place [branch stores] and of course the Paia Meat Market because conversion of the main store to supermarket way of operation.

WN: When was this that they converted to cash-and-carry supermarket style?

HT: Shee, that's the thing. (Laughs) I would think probably in the late forties, I think. Or early fifties. Yeah.

WN: That's when all deliveries and order taking stopped?

HT: See, they were trying to educate the people at that time to discontinue delivery, [and that] they can come down and buy it at a better price. So it was pretty rough trying to explain to them and some of these people were so sensitive that they said, "Oh, we not going to buy from Paia Store anymore." They go elsewhere. And these are the things that hurt us for a while. But, evidently the other independent business stores ran into the same problems that we had maybe in a different way, I think, because they had to cut back, too. They ran into different problems themselves.

WN: You mean, while Paia Store went to cash and carry, the other independent stores were still going the old style?

HT: The old style, you see? And, eventually they went into some trouble of their own, they couldn't continue because the cost was getting high and the labor movement was coming in, changing the whole business set up. Maui Dry Goods changed. . .



WN: Can you explain how the labor movement changed the business set up?

HT: You see, on the plantation--I had forgotten quite a bit but--they used to get a lot of perquisites. Most of these perquisites were converted to cash and they were [now] being paid hourly, so much an hour, and whatever was the demand at that time increased the operating of the business that much more. There were a lot of things involved at that time. A lot of things we were receiving just about free, the perquisites and everything. But then it was being converted that we pay so much a month, the rental for the house. . .

WN: After the union?

HT: A lot of the employees felt that they rather pay as you go. Get that cash and pay as you go. That's how a lot of these people felt. The hourly rate, how ours compared with the others, I don't know what the difference was but they wouldn't tell you that, it's confidential. But later on, the boys would compare notes of different companies. But anyway, the buying habits really changed because they had the money and at the time they would shop around to see where the prices are low and they go out with that money and buy--they don't have to depend on the credit sales. So they have that much more money. So if the customers begin to change their habits you have to change your operating way of business, otherwise, you're going to lose more money.

WN: But, some of the other stores were still taking orders and delivering, huh, didn't the customers prefer it that way?

HT: Yeah, they preferred it that way but the other businesses had to sell out or fold up. A lot of them, that's what happened. Not immediately but not long afterwards. We had a lot of different small stores, even Lower Paia and other places but today you don't find. Because a lot of them went out of business because their operating cost was too high.

WN: You mean paying salesmen and trucks and things?

HT: And merchandise, the cost was up, too. Not like long time ago so all the costs were up. Of course, the money was there but to keep up with the demand and the supply and at what price they can buy and sell, this is the problem with the small merchants, too. But with us [plantation store], we had the money so we don't think about those things too much. We have the capital but then we are always told to watch our cash flow. Whenever we take an inventory and study the merchandise we find that if there's any slow moving [item] we have to watch it and do something about it. Each time that the operation of business gets tighter all these things come into the picture more. They fall into its place because the pressure is applied on you. You think of all different angles to cut down the cost. But these people who received the increase in

their wages they learned how to buy, you know, to go out and shop so the buying habits has changed.

WN: So about when did you notice costs starting to go up and the old system becoming less efficient or profitable? Was this after the union?

HT: Yeah, after the union. Yeah, after. Because up until then--the war years you cannot depend on that, because there's a scare and hysterics and they want to buy everything, they want to keep it because they don't know when they're going to get the supply or whatever it is. But other than that, in a normal run, we were doing all right at the time but when the people changed their way of living, this brings about change in everything. The life in the community, the life in the business life and everything. And with different business operations, different people coming in makes a lot of difference, too.

WN: Different people?

HT: Yeah, it's like Kress Store came in, eh? I don't know what year was that.

WN: Kress came where, Wailuku?

HT: Wailuku. And at that time Kahului Railroad had bus running and a lot of people used to ride to Wailuku on the bus. They go buy and if people usually go and buy they like to finish their shopping everything down there and come home. They're not going to stop at your place. So different outfit comes in and opens business and that makes a lot of difference, too.

WN: Why did Paia people go all the way to Wailuku to buy when they could have just gone to Paia Store?

HT: Well, I think something new and they might find something they want down there and usually the prices are cheaper down there. A lot of people used to go and buy and come home.

WN: You're talking about the union changing the lifestyle, did more people start to buy automobiles?

HT: Oh, that I really don't know, but I know the individuals all had cars coming to work because the mill was right in front us, Paia Store. We see the cars come in and they park the cars in the parking places and they go to work, but a lot of the immediate people that live close by walk and come, but other than that there were a lot of cars there. But I believe from what I gather, these people were much happier receiving the money and disbursing the money for whatever expenses they have. They rather have the gross amount in their hand. This is what some of the guys told me, the union people. This was early 1946.

WN: So you folks changed to a supermarket style of operation, cash and carry, yeah?

HT: Yeah.

WN: Earlier you talked about you had to educate the people?

HT: Yeah.

WN: In what way did you have to educate them?

HT: We had to give them the pro and con of the items they can buy at the better price if they come down to the supermarket [rather] than to have it delivered because on delivery charges the items would be more expensive. At the supermarket they can pick out the items they want at that price and they have the liberty to move around and see whatever they want, and at the same time finish shopping. Whatever we don't have they can go to the other place and go home. The other way, they just order what they want and they get it, and it's higher price because of the delivery. So this was the area we had to let them understand because some of these people who has been buying for years and years--maybe forty, fifty years. And it's pretty hard to change when a person is really following that old custom. To change the style of living all of a sudden is kind of hard to take for some of the people.

WN: So was it pretty favorable, did people rather have it that way [cash and carry]?

HT: Yeah, other stores converted to supermarkets, Ah Fook Store, you have Ben Franklin, you get Noda Market, all these people went on that basis. They followed through all, you see? So now I think the people hunt for prices. They shop around now, they're having their enjoyment in doing that, I think. Because the only thing you hear gripes is that the price is too high here or there. (Laughs) They compare, but other than that I believe now that they have learned; I think they're in a better frame of mind now.

WN: You said later on they started hunting for prices, but before that how did they determine who they're going to buy from?

HT: You mean on delivery?

WN: Yeah.

HT: When the order man comes around--he's been coming around to your place, say, twenty years, thirty years--they're kind of obligated when they come around, they give him the order. And if they know that he's coming around every month, they wait for him. And if they need anything--if they hear some prices are low--maybe weekend they might come down, but somehow they have a habit of staying home and let the store deliver the merchandise to their doorstep or into

their kitchen so they don't have to go through the hassle of traveling, buying, hauling. But now, things have changed but a lot of people, like I said, when we used to work, we used to have the love and the interest of the company in those days. So when we were at Paia Store we have that feeling, but somehow we come down here each time that feeling thins out. (Laughs)

WN: You mean when you moved to Kahului Store?

HT: When you come down this way. Like in our case, we've been in the business for so many years that it's ingrained in us. It doesn't go away and some people who came later on have this feeling, but they felt as though somehow it began to thin out because they find the others, they don't feel like the way you feel. They just take what they can and they do whatever they can and that's it. Like the olden days when the salesman [order taker] goes and take the order, well, they have this love for each other, they depend on you. But today they have their own cars and everything so they know [whenever] the prices are way down, they know this different shop or shopping centers have supermarkets so they come down now. Things have changed.

WN: When you said that some of the independent stores still stayed on the old system, what stores were these?

HT: Like, originally, we were the one, the first hit. And I think Maui Dry Goods, I believe, at that year they were still running the same way and like this Kobayashi Store and Onishi Store, they had plenty stores like that. Then Japanese Mercantile, Waki Store and all different stores down the line. They used to sell charge, they take order and they sell, they deliver and all that. But then as they became educated [and] they know the prices, they began to compare if they can save so much they would come to the supermarket and do the shopping themselves. But in the beginning--the sudden change--probably they still wanted that homely service that they used to get because some of these people they deliver, they just stack it up neatly, then they come out from the house to deliver to the next house. You know the kind personal touch. (Laughs) Some people were used to the personal touch in our service and somehow losing that personal touch, they didn't like it, I think. But, once they know how much they can save and at what location they can get everything or here or there, I think that's how they begin to change.

WN: So when Paia Store went to cash and carry, was there really a drop in the price of each item?

HT: Yeah, they cut back, they set it up. Because we don't deliver anymore.

WN: What percent?

HT: Gee, I don't know. I've forgotten already. Because that was handled by the other man, this old man Shoda, he was a good merchandise man Paia Store had. He and the bosses got together and worked it out, or was it his assistant? But anyway there was a cut down on the price because we no longer going to deliver and we not going to go and take order. The expenses are not there so.

WN: You must have laid off quite a few people, employees?

HT: Yeah, some of them, I wonder how we handled that situation because in some areas, later on, the drastic areas some of them took early retirement, some took another job, some took severance pay, whatever it is. But all in all, a lot of the employees were given a job in the beginning, but towards the end it was hard. Because you're shrinking so you cannot finagle anything, so they have to be paid severance pay or be transferred to another department on the plantation. But in the end I believe you couldn't transfer anybody from the store to the plantation because the trade is different altogether, that's why. I don't know what year they stopped that.

WN: So in 1948 MA Company and HC&S Company merged. How did that affect the plantation store situation?

HT: Oh, the executives all had headaches because both sides had big inventory and to whittle that thing down, it took quite a lot of effort. We took a lot of loss and they really worked hard, though. But then the tidal wave in 1960 really made it worse because we were coming out pretty good and all of a sudden bang.

WN: This was over in Kahului when you moved?

HT: Yeah. I forgot now how many percentage we recovered and there was some tax credit of some kind. But I know that the managers were really working hard trying to make some way to get the company to pay it's way and show a profitable operation. Because we were needed every time at least to come up with 9 percent or so in return on investment. But all I know is business, and this big operation is pretty rough when the operation is in that condition. I worked in my life--forty-one years over there--with ten managers. All of them had different philosophies of operating the business. Although it was interesting, there were a lot of times it was pretty rough because a different person works at a different pace, you know, in a different way. But we have to be in line with what the home office wants. But when we were, I think, first we were with HC&S and afterwards HC&S became A&B [Alexander & Baldwin]. I don't know what year was that.

WN: A&B Commercial [Company], about 1950.



HT: Nineteen fifty, yeah? That's when Honolulu started pressing the button. But as far as my work is concerned at the store I received a lot of help from those people down there. I had a good relationship and I'm really thankful that they really helped me and on this side Mr. [Leslie] Bisset was really a man who really helped me with the work. Anyway, when I took the work I made this condition, I said if you would continue to help me I would take the work. (Laughs)

WN: When you retired in 1969, what was your official title?

HT: I was office manager and something to do with administrative assistant, I don't know that nomenclature. (Laughs) It's some kind of title they give you when they don't know what to give you, I don't know.

(Laughter)

WN: So when you're talking about transitional period, things changing from the old style to the new style, do you think that was a natural thing or...

HT: Yeah, it was coming. We were sort of a pioneer in that field over here. If we didn't do it at that time, we would have to do it at a later date because other people are moving in, like Kress came in with that type of operation. So in this field the National Cash Register--see we bought our cash register from them--so they had this layout, the floor layout for our supermarket operation--where to put what merchandise so you can make the people walk through with the way the merchandise was set up. The particular staple food...

WN: At Paia Store?

HT: Yeah, Paia Store, the A&B Supermarket [Kahului], all, so you get that thing all arranged. Then you make the customer walk and as they walk they'll see different items and they pick it off and put it in the basket or the cart or whatever it is. So these are the things that we learned in setting up the gondolas. So they were really helpful. I believe that we did the right thing. I know maybe some of the people who retired and living might scalp me but. (Laughs) But I believe and know that it was coming and we had to do it. But all in all it was an interesting work for forty-one years.

WN: Do you have any last things to add?

HT: I really don't know but all I know is that if you become too mechanical--I don't know what is being disinterested or interested--but what we felt as we worked in the store at that time, we had the love and interest of the operation where we worked



eight hours. Unless you have that I don't think you can perform your work to the hilt. If you go there just to put in your time and do whatever is required of you and come home, it's an empty life unless it's meaningful to you. So if you have a goal or something, if you can set up a goal and if this is the thing that you really like for your future, then if you can get into it and if you love it and you have your interest in it, I think everything will fall in its place. (Laughs)

WN: That's good advice, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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STOREKEEPERS of  
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**Volume I**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Ethnic Studies Program  
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

**June 1980**